

Patent Application of
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for
2-Dimensional Optical Fiber Array Made from Etched Sticks
Having Notches

10 RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present application claims the benefit of priority of
copending provisional application 60/195,559, filed on
04/06/2000, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

15 FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to 2-dimensional
optical fiber arrays. More particularly, it relates to a 2-D
fiber array structure and a method for making the structure.
2-D fiber arrays are often used in optical communications and
optical switching devices.

20 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Arrays of optical fibers are used in fiber connectors, optical
25 fiber switches (e.g. free space optical switches) and various
kinds of sensors and displays. Typically in such optical fiber
arrays, the optical fiber must be positioned with high
accuracy (e.g. within +/- 1 micron).

30 1-dimensional (1-D) fiber arrays are commonly manufactured
using wet anisotropic etching of <100> silicon to form V-
grooves. Optical fibers placed in the V-grooves are accurately
located.

2-dimensional fiber arrays for use in free-space optical switches are currently in high demand. A problem with 2-D optical fiber arrays is that they are very difficult to manufacture with high accuracy.

5 One technique used to make accurate 2-D fiber arrays is to directionally etch lithographically-defined holes through a wafer of material (e.g. silicon). Optical fibers are then inserted into the holes. The optical fibers are accurately
10 located because the holes are defined lithographically. The holes can be made using reactive ion etching (RIE) or anisotropic wet etching of silicon, for example. A substantial problem with this technique is that inserting optical fibers through holes is very slow and tedious. Often, the optical
15 fibers break during insertion.

Another technique for making 2-D arrays is to stack V-groove chips (e.g. silicon V-groove chips) having V-grooves on both sides of the chip. A substantial problem with this technique
20 is that the location of the optical fibers is dependent upon the thickness of the substrates used to make the V-groove chips. Since it is difficult to control the thickness of substrates to the required tolerances, run-out error occurs in 2-D fiber arrays having several stacked V-groove chips. US
25 pat. No. 5,044,711 to Saito discloses a 2-D optical fiber array made from stacked V-groove chips.

US Pat no. 5,483,611 to Basavanhally discloses a 2-D optical fiber array having stacked 1-D V-groove arrays. The apparatus
30 of Basavanhally employs mechanical adjustments for positioning the 1-D V-groove fiber arrays.

US Pat no. 4,407,562 to Young discloses an optical switch having a 2-D fiber array made from wafers having V-grooves. The 2-D fiber array is made from stacked V-groove chips.

5 US Pat. No. 3,864,018 to Miller discloses a 2-D fiber array made from a stack of V-groove chips. The thickness of the V-groove chips must be accurately controlled for accurate fiber positioning.

10 US pat. No. 4,046,454 to Pugh et al. discloses yet another 2-D fiber array made from stacking V-groove chips. The fiber array of Pugh et al. has layers of compliant material that press optical fibers into the V-grooves.

15 US Pat. No. 5,146,532 to Hodge discloses an optical fiber retaining device for holding optical fibers. The device has interlocking plastic pieces that can be stacked. The fiber holder of Hodge is not suitable for making precision 2-D optical fiber arrays.

20 There exists a need in the art of optical fiber devices for an accurate 2-dimensional fiber array that is easy to assemble. Such a 2-D fiber array would be useful for making optical switches and other devices.

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OBJECTS AND ADVANTAGES OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, it is a primary object of the present invention to provide a 2-dimensional optical fiber array that:

- 30 1) is easy to assemble and does not require insertion of optical fibers through tiny holes;
- 2) provides extremely accurate alignment of optical fibers;

3) provides for arbitrary 2-D fiber arrangements (e.g. hexagonal grid, square grid) defined according to a lithographic pattern;

- 5 4) does not require the use of chips having accurately defined thickness.

These and other objects and advantages will be apparent upon reading the following description and accompanying drawings.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

These objects and advantages are attained by a 2-D optical fiber array having a plurality of stacked, etched sticks, and an optical fiber disposed between the etched sticks. The etched sticks have notches that form cages for holding the optical fibers. The notches have surfaces that are directionally dry-etched in a direction perpendicular to a front surface of the array (the optical fiber is roughly perpendicular to the front surface).

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The etched sticks may have top and bottom surfaces that are directionally dry etched. Alternatively, the etched sticks have top and bottom surfaces that are cleaved surfaces. In case the top and bottom surfaces are cleaved, the etched sticks are stacked so that complementary cleaved surfaces are adjacent to one another.

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The etched sticks can also have alignment holes and alignment rods disposed in the alignment holes of the etched sticks. The alignment holes and alignment rods are oriented perpendicular to the optical fibers and extend through an interior of the etched sticks. Also, the front surface of the 2-D array can have etched pits or grooves (e.g. anisotropically etched V-grooves).

The etched sticks can be diffusion bonded together, glued together (e.g. with epoxy), or adhered together with materials such as spin-on-glass (SOG) or sol-gel materials. Preferably, the etched sticks are made of silicon.

In an alternative embodiment of the invention, the notches are not necessarily dry etched, but are made according to many other techniques such as laser drilling. In this embodiment, the top and bottom surfaces of the etched sticks are necessarily cleaved or directionally dry etched.

The present invention also includes a method for making the etched sticks by making a perforated chip having a 2-D array of holes. The perforated chip is cleaved to separate it into etched sticks. ^{The} ~~Th~~ cleave lines necessarily intersect the holes so that fibers can be placed in the resulting notches.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

Fig. 1 shows a perspective view of the 2-D fiber array according to the present invention.

Fig. 2 shows a perspective view of a single etched stick.

Fig. 3 shows a top view of optical fibers disposed in the notches of an etched stick.

Figs. 4a-c show front views of various designs for etched sticks.

Fig. 5 shows a front view of an etched stick having long flanges.

Fig. 6a shows a front view of a fiber array according to the present invention.

Fig. 6b shows a front view of a fiber array where the etched sticks have notches in only their top surface.

Fig. 7 shows a wafer and mask patterns used for making the etched sticks by directional dry etching.

Fig. 8 shows etched sticks made by the mask in Fig. 7.

Fig. 9a, 9b and 10 show alternative embodiments for the flanges.

Fig. 11 shows a cross sectional side view of the fiber array.

5 Fig. 12 shows a cross sectional side view of the array cut through the flanges.

Fig. 13a shows a perforated chip used in making etched sticks according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

10 Fig. 13b shows shows a perforated chip that has joined holes. The perforated chip of Fig. 13b only need to be cleaved at the flanges to separate it into etched sticks.

Fig. 14 shows the perforated chip is cleaved to separate it into etched sticks.

15 Fig. 15 shows a cross sectional side view of an array (cut through the flanges) made by cleaving.

Fig. 16 shows a perspective view of a jig used for assembling the fiber array from optical fibers and etched sticks.

Fig. 17 shows a front view of a preferred embodiment where the etched sticks have alignment holes for improved alignment.

20 Fig. 18 shows a perspective view of a single etched stick having alignment holes.

Fig. 19 shows an edge-on view of two bonded wafers used for making the etched sticks with alignment holes.

25 Fig. 20 shows a top view of a wafer and mask patterns used for making etched sticks with alignment holes.

Fig. 21 shows a top view of a wafer and mask pattern used for making etched sticks with grooved endfaces.

30 Fig. 22 shows a single etched stick having grooves endfaces.

Fig. 23 shows a side view of a 2-D fiber array having two separate stacks of etched sticks. The relative position of the two stacks provide angular control of the optical fibers.

Fig. 24 shows an etched stick having vertically oriented V-grooves in the front surface. The V-grooves can be used to provide lateral alignment in the jig 68 of Fig. 16.

Fig. 25 shows a cross sectional side view of a double-sided etched stick.

Fig. 26 shows a cross sectional side view of a 2-D array made from double-sided etched sticks.

Fig. 27 shows a perspective view of a double-sided etched stick.

Figs. 28a-28e illustrate a preferred method for making a double-sided etched stick.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The present invention provides 2-dimensional (2-D) fiber arrays that are accurate and easy to assemble. According to the present invention, 'sticks' are directionally etched (e.g. using deep reactive ion etching, DRIE) from a wafer of material (e.g. silicon, silica). Each stick has notches for accommodating optical fibers. The dimensions and shape of the sticks and notches are defined by a lithographic mask. The fiber array is made by alternately stacking the optical fibers and notched sticks. In the present invention, the optical fibers and sticks are arranged so that the optical fibers extend in a direction parallel with the wafer thickness direction of the etched sticks. In an alternative embodiment, the etched sticks are cleaved from a wafer so that they have perfectly matching surfaces for stacking.

Fig. 1 shows a perspective view of the 2-D fiber array according to the present invention. The 2-D array of the present invention has optical fibers 20 disposed between etched sticks 22 having notches 24. The notches 24 form cages that enclose the optical fibers 20. The optical fibers 20 are

preferably uncoated glass fibers known in the art. The fibers can be round or have other shapes (e.g. a D-shape, as known for polarization-maintaining fibers). The optical fibers 20 have endfaces 23. The etched sticks are preferably made of silicon. The sticks 22 can also be made of other materials that can be etched using directional dry etching (DRIE, RIE) techniques, such as silica. Preferably, thickness 26 is in the range of about 0.3-2 millimeters, or, more preferably, in the range of about 0.6-1 millimeter. Thickness 26 is determined by a thickness of the wafers used to make the etched sticks. During fabrication of the etched sticks, directional dry etching proceeds in a direction parallel with the optical fibers 20. Generally, for silica optical fibers, the etched sticks should have a thickness of about 4-7 times the diameter of the optical fibers.

Optionally, some or all of the etched sticks have micromachined pits 21. The pits 21 can be etched in silicon using an anisotropic etchant such as KOH, for example. The pits 21 can be made using other techniques as well, including isotropic etching, dry etching, or laser machining, for example. The pits 21 can be defined lithographically so that they are accurately located with respect to the mechanical features (e.g. notches) of the etched sticks. The pits 21 can be used to passively align optical components (e.g. lenslet arrays, laser arrays) to the optical fibers 20.

Fig. 2 shows a single etched stick 22 according to the present invention. The etched stick has a thickness 26 that is defined by (i.e. equal to) a thickness of a wafer used to make the etched stick. A front surface 32 of the etched stick is the top or bottom surface of the wafer used to make the etched stick. Preferably, the front surface is the side of the wafer that was masked during directional dry etching of the stick.

laser

The front surface **32** may also have etched pits **21**. The etched stick **22** also has a rear surface **34** (not directly visible).

5 The notches **24** are formed by dry etching in a direction illustrated by arrow **28** (perpendicular to the front surface **32**). As such, the notches typically have features **30** indicative of dry etching, such as microscopic scallops (typical of cyclical dry etching processes such as the Bosch process) or striations parallel with arrow **28**. It is noted
10 that the features **30** may not appear, or may be very small in some embodiments of the present invention. This is because some directional dry etching techniques (e.g. cryogenically cooling the wafer during etching) produce very smooth sidewalls with very little scalloping or striating. So
15 although features **30** are commonly indicative of directional dry etching, the features **30** may not be present in some directionally dry etched sticks. In fact, it is generally preferable in the present invention for the directional dry etching technique to produce smooth sidewalls because smooth
20 sidewalls tend to provide improved optical fiber alignment.

The etched stick **22** also has a top surface **25** and a bottom surface **27**. Preferably, the top surface **25** and bottom surface **27** (not directly visible) are directionally dry etched
25 sidewalls. The top and bottom surfaces can be made in the same step as the notches, and so the notches and top and bottom surfaces can have the same features **30** indicative of dry etching.

30 In a preferred embodiment, the notches **24** are the same size at the front surface **32** and rear surface **34** (i.e., the DRIE process used to make the sticks produces perfectly vertical sidewalls). However, this is generally not possible in practice; DRIE typically has a nonzero undercut angle.

Fig. 3 shows a top view of several optical fibers disposed in notches **24** of an etched stick. DRIE processes typically cannot produce perfectly vertical sidewalls, but rather produce slightly undercut sidewalls. Therefore, it is preferable for the optical fibers **20** to be placed so that fiber endfaces **23** are located at the surface of the etched stick that was masked during dry etching. For example, if the front surface **32** was masked during dry etching of the notches **24**, then the optical fiber **20** should be oriented as shown, with the fiber endfaces **23** flush with the front surface **32**. Arranging the optical fiber endfaces **23** on the masked side of the etched sticks **22** provides for improved alignment of the optical fibers. Notch **24u** illustrates undercutting where the dry etching mask was on the front face **32**. Notch **24u** is wider on the rear surface **34** of the etched stick **22**.

Figs. 4a-4c show front views of several designs for etched sticks.

Fig. 4a shows an etched stick having notches **24** staggered so that the etched stick has a zig-zag shape. Preferably, the etched sticks have flat portions **36** between the notches **24**.

Fig. 4b shows an etched stick having notches **24** aligned opposite one another. This embodiment is not preferred because the stick is susceptible to breaking at the notch corners.

Fig. 4c shows an etched stick having round notches **24**. Round notches are less susceptible to breaking than notches with sharp corners.

Fig. 5 shows an etched stick having large flanges **38**. Flanges provide surfaces for mating the etched sticks to one another.

Flange length **40** can be about 0.5-10 millimeters, or about 1, 2, 4, 5 or 7 millimeters.

Fig. 6a shows a front view of a 2-D fiber array according to the present invention. The optical fibers **20** should be 'caged' by the notches **24**. In other words, the separation between the etched sticks should be determined by only the dimensions of the sticks, and not the diameter of the optical fibers **20**. The notches **24** should be sized so that openings formed by the notches will always be larger than the largest optical fiber expected. An abnormally large optical fiber larger than the cages will dislocate the optical fibers in the array.

Fig. 6b shows a front view of an alternative embodiment of the present invention where the sticks **22** have notches **24** on one side only.

As noted, the etched sticks **22** are made by directional dry etching (e.g. DRIE). **Fig. 7** shows a top view of a wafer **50** and mask **52** for making the etched sticks. The mask shape is the shape of the etched sticks as viewed from the front (**Figs. 4a-4c** and **Fig. 5**). The thickness of the wafer **50** is the thickness **26** of the etched sticks **22**. The mask can be made of metal, silicon nitride, silicon oxide or many other materials known in the art. Preferably, the wafer is made of silicon. The mask may remain on the etched sticks, or it may be removed after the sticks are fabricated.

Dry etching completely through the wafer **50** of **Fig. 7** produces the etched sticks shown in **Fig. 8**.

Preferably, if pits **21** are formed in the etched sticks, the pits **21** and sticks are fabricated using a single lithographic step process. For example, the metal masking method described

in US patent application 09/519,165 (herein incorporated by reference) by David Sherrer and Gregory Ten Eyck can be used to pattern the pits **21** and etched sticks using the same single lithographic mask. In this case, the pit **21** will generally be circumscribed by a metal ring **51**. Defining the sticks and pits **21** in the same masking step assures that the pits are accurately located with respect to the notches.

Figs. 9a-b show front views of etched sticks having positive lateral alignment features **54b** and negative lateral alignment features **54a**. The lateral alignment features **54a**, **54b** are defined by the mask in the dry etching process. The lateral alignment features **54** prevent the etched sticks from moving laterally (left-right) with respect to one another. This helps preserve optical fiber alignment. Preferably, the lateral alignment features **54a**, **54b** are designed so that a small gap **53** (e.g. 2-20 microns) exists between the sticks. The gap **53** helps to prevent dust particles from disturbing the alignment of the sticks. The positive and negative alignment features can have the complementary or different shapes.

Fig. 10 shows a front view of etched sticks having pads **56** for a fixed separation between etched sticks **22**. The pads **56** can provide the gap **53** so that contaminant particles do not interfere with fiber alignment.

Fig. 11 shows a cross sectional side view of a fiber array of the present invention. The front surface **32** was the surface masked during etching of the sticks **22**. Undercutting during dry etching causes the notches **24** to be larger at the rear surface **34**. Preferably, the front surface **32** and fiber endface **23** are flush as shown. The front surface **32** and fiber endface **23** can be polished simultaneously to produce a flush surface.

Fig. 12 shows a cross sectional side view of stacked sticks cut through the flange **38**. Here, the effect of undercutting during dry etching produces wedge-shaped gaps **60**. For good contact between the flanges (i.e. contact at more than just the front surface **32**), the gaps **60** should be as small as possible. This requires dry etching with essentially perfectly vertical sidewalls (zero undercut). The undercut of the dry etch is indicated by angle **61**. Preferably, the directional dry etching used in making the sticks has an undercut angle of less than 1 degree. Generally, angle **61** should be as small as possible.

In an alternative method for making the etched sticks, a combination of directional dry etching and cleaving is used. Dry etching is used to create a perforated chip having holes sized and located for positioning optical fiber endfaces. Then, the perforated chip is cleaved into sticks.

Fig. 13a shows a top view of a perforated chip **62**. The perforated chip **62** has holes **64** that are sized and located for positioning optical fibers. In fact, the perforated chip may be used by inserting optical fibers into the holes **64** (but this is not part of the present invention). The perforated chip may be made of silicon, and may be about 300-1000 microns thick. The holes may be spaced at a pitch of about 250-500 microns. The perforated chip is preferably made using directional dry etching (DRIE), but other methods such as laser drilling or wet anisotropic etching of <100> silicon (forming square holes) may also be used. Directional dry etching is preferred because it is lithographically defined and hence extremely accurate.

Fig. 13b shows an alternative embodiment where the holes in the perforated chip are joined. The sticks comprising the perforated chip are only joined at the flange portion.

Fig. 14 shows the next step in making the fiber arrays of the present invention from the perforated chip **62**. Here, the perforated chip **62** is cleaved along cleave lines **66**. Cleaving separates the perforated chip into etched sticks. The cleave lines necessarily intersect the holes **64**, forming notches **24**. This allows optical fibers to be placed onto the notches, rather than inserted through the holes **64**. In the case where the perforated chip has joined holes (shown in **Fig. 13b**), the perforated chip only needs to be cleaved at the flanges.

If the etched sticks **22** are separated by cleaving, then the top surface **25** and bottom surface **27** (shown in **Fig. 2**) are cleaved surfaces. When the etched sticks are reassembled with optical fibers to form the optical fiber array, it is preferable for the etched sticks to be stacked so that adjacent sticks in the perforated chip **62** are also adjacent in the assembled 2-D array. In other words, cleaved surfaces are rejoined in the array. This helps to assure accurate alignment of the etched sticks because the rejoined surfaces are complementary. It is preferable for the sticks to be stacked so that adjacent cleaved surfaces on adjacent sticks are complementary. In the case where the perforated chip has joined holes (as in **Fig. 13b**), only the top and bottom surfaces of the flanges will be cleaved surfaces.

Fig. 15 shows a cross sectional side view of 3 stacked sticks having cleaved top and bottom surfaces. The sticks may have scribe lines **65** used to facilitate cleaving. Sticks have good contact at surface **67** because these surfaces were cleaved and

then rejoined. The surfaces are complementary because they were produced by cleaving.

The optical fiber arrays of the present invention are made by alternately stacking the etched sticks and optical fibers. Since the optical fibers do not have to be threaded through tiny holes, they are simple to make. However, during assembly, the sticks and fibers must be held in accurate alignment; preferably, mechanical fiduciarities are used to provide alignment during assembly of the array.

Fig. 16 shows a perspective view of a jig **68** used in assembly of the present optical fiber arrays. A first etched stick **22a** is disposed in the jig **68**, which holds the stick in a fixed position. Optical fibers **20** are placed in the notches **24** of the first etched stick **22a**. After the fibers are placed, a second etched stick **22b**, is disposed on top of the fibers and first etched stick. Fibers and sticks are stacked until the array is finished. The jig **68** may be made of metal, ceramic, plastic or any other material.

Optionally, pits **21** (shown in **Fig. 1**) are used to align the etched sticks in the jig. Pits **21** can be used for alignment by providing posts or raised features (not shown) on the surfaces of the jig **68**. Posts on the jig **68** mate with the pits **21**, providing passive alignment for the etched sticks.

Preferably, the sticks and optical fibers **20** are held together by glue such as UV curable epoxy. The glue can be applied and cured after the entire array has been assembled. Alternatively, the sticks and fibers are held together using solder, diffusion bonds, chemical covalent bonds (e.g. Al-oxide bond), spin-on-glass (SOG), or sol-gel materials. For example, optical fibers and sticks can be coated with thin

metal films and then soldered together. If the sticks are made of silicon and coated with gold (e.g. 200 angstroms) on top and bottom surfaces, then they can be diffusion bonded together. Gold diffusion bonding of silicon can be performed at temperatures low enough to avoid damaging the optical fibers. Spin-on-glass can be applied after the array is assembled; the array is heated after SOG application to form the glass.

Fig. 17 shows a front view of a preferred embodiment of the present invention where the etched sticks have alignment holes **70**. The alignment holes extend parallel to the front surface of the array and through the sticks (between top surface and bottom surfaces of the sticks. An alignment pin **72** (e.g. metal wire or glass fiber) is disposed with the alignment holes. The alignment holes and alignment pins help to fix the positions of the etched sticks.

Fig. 18 shows a single etched stick having alignment holes **70**.

The alignment holes **70** can be made by bonding together two wafers having long grooves (e.g. such as anisotropically etched V-grooves in silicon). The grooves are aligned to form holes extending parallel to the wafer surface. **Fig. 19** shows an edge-on view of two bonded wafers having V-grooves aligned to form holes **74**. The holes **74** become alignment holes **70** when the wafers are cut or cleaved into etched sticks.

Fig. 20 shows a top view of a wafer having holes **74** for providing alignment holes **70** in the etched sticks. Patterns **76** are masked for dry etching to form etched sticks.

The holes **74** and etched sticks can also be aligned as shown in **Fig. 21**. Here, the holes **74** are aligned to produce grooves in

the endfaces of the etched sticks. **Fig. 22** shows a top view of an etched stick having grooves **78** in the endfaces **80**.

Fig. 23 shows another embodiment of the present invention where two stacks **84**, **86** of etched sticks are used for alignment of a single array of fibers. Here, angular control of the optical fibers is provided by relatively positioning the two stacks.

Fig. 24 shows another embodiment of the present invention where a stick has vertically oriented grooves **88** on the front surface **32**. The grooves **88** can be formed (e.g. by anisotropic wet etching of silicon using KOH) prior to dry etching of the sticks. The grooves **88** can be used to provide lateral alignment of the etched sticks in the jig **68** of **Fig. 16**. For example, the jig **68** can have raised vertical lines for mating with the V-grooves **88**. Of course, the V-grooves do not need to be V-shaped; the grooves can have any shape such as a U-shape provided by isotropic etching. Also, V-grooves can be oriented parallel with the length of the etched stick.

Fig. 25 shows a cross sectional side view of a single stick according to an alternative embodiment of the present invention. Here, this stick is 'double-sided'; the stick has a front portion **90** and a rear portion **92**. An etch-stop layer **94** (e.g. made of silicon nitride or silicon dioxide) separates the front and rear portions of the double-sided stick. The stick is made by directional dry etching from both the front surface **32** and the rear surface **34**. The stick is made by dry etching the front portion **90** from the front surface **32** to the etch stop layer **94** and dry etching the rear portion **92** from the rear surface to the etch stop layer **94**.

The thicknesses **96**, **98** of the front portion **90** and rear portion **92** can be in the range of about 0.3-2 millimeters, more preferably in the range of about 0.4-0.8 millimeters. The etch stop layer **94** can have a thickness **100** in the range of about 0.1-5 microns. The etch stop layer is only required for stopping the sry etch process and for bonding together the front portion and rear portion.

Fig. 26 shows a cross sectional side view of a 2-D fiber array made with sticks shown in **Fig. 25**. The optical fibers contact the double-sided sticks at the front surface **32** and the rear surface **34**. Two points of contact between the sticks and fibers provide improved alignment compared to the embodiment of **Figs. 1** and **11**, where the optical fibers tend to contact the sticks only at the front surface **32**. Also, the embodiment of **Fig. 26** provides improved angular alignment of the optical fibers since the fibers are constrained at both the front surface **32** and rear surface **34**.

In a double-sided etched stick, the front surface **32** and rear surface **34** may be identical.

Fig. 27 shows a perspective view of a single double-sided etched stick. The undercut angle cannot be seen in this view because the undercut angle is typically very small (e.g. about 1-3 degrees). The notches **24** extend through both the front portion **90** and the rear portion **92**.

Figs 28a-28e Illustrate a method for making the double-sided etched sticks shown in **Figs. 25, 26, and 27**.

Fig. 28a-Top and bottom silicon wafers **101**, **103** are bonded together with an intervening etch stop layer **102**. The silicon wafers can have the same or different thicknesses. This

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structure is essentially the same as an SOI wafer. The thicknesses of the wafers determines (i.e. is equal to) the thickness of the front portion and rear portion of the etched sticks.

28a-28b-Both sides of the wafer are identically patterned with a dry etch mask **104** (e.g. silicon nitride, metal, silicon dioxide). The patterns on both sides of the wafer should be aligned.

28b-28c-Directional dry etching is performed on the top wafer down to the etch stop layer.

28c-28d-Directional dry etching is performed on the bottom wafer down to the etch stop layer.

28d-28e-The etch stop layer **102** is removed from exposed areas (e.g. by wet etching) to separate the sticks. The mask **104** may remain on the final product.

It is noted that pits **21** and V-grooves **88** can be formed on the double-sided sticks. In fact, pits **21** and/or V-grooves **88** can be formed on the front surface, rear surface, or both surfaces.

It is also noted that a small misalignment is possible between the masks on the top and bottom silicon wafers. This will result in the notch having slightly different locations in the front portion and the rear portion. A small misalignment is tolerable if the thickness of the etched stick (i.e. front portion thickness + etch stop layer thickness + rear portion thickness) is great enough. An optical fiber can bend slightly to accommodate a small misalignment between the front portion and rear portion notches. For example, a front-rear

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